The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California — An Overview

The Metropolitan story dates back to the early 20th century, as Southern California cities were faced with a growing population and shrinking local groundwater supplies. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California was established in 1928 under an act of the California Legislature to build and operate the 242-mile Colorado River Aqueduct that would bring water to southern coastal areas. Southland residents voted for a major bond in the depths of the Great Depression to fund the herculean construction effort through the desert to deliver essential water supplies and generate badly-needed jobs.

The post-World War II boom and 1950s dry spells prompted a huge expansion of the Metropolitan service area as new cities began seeking additional reliable water supplies.

In 1960, Metropolitan, along with 30 other public agencies, signed a long-term contract that made possible the construction of the State Water Project, including reservoirs, pumping plants and the 444-mile California Aqueduct, which currently serves urban and agricultural agencies from the San Francisco Bay to Southern California. As the largest of the now 29 agencies, Metropolitan contracts with the state Department of Water Resources, which owns and operates the State Water Project, for slightly less than half of all supplies delivered to Metropolitan.

Metropolitan’s mission is to provide its service area with adequate and reliable supplies of high-quality water to meet present and future needs in an environmentally and economically responsible way.

Today, Metropolitan serves a 5,200-square-mile service area that includes Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties. More than 1,800 employees perform a wide range of water management, planning, conservation and other activities to serve Metropolitan’s 26 public member agencies. Metropolitan provides more than 50 percent of the region’s water through imported supplies and investments in new local projects and conservation.

Each member agency is entitled to at least one director; additional directors are based on each member agency’s assessed valuation.
Metropolitan owns and operates five treatment plants, four of which are among the 10 largest in the United States. Metropolitan tests its water for almost 400 regulated constituents and performs nearly 250,000 water quality tests annually on samples gathered from the district’s vast water distribution system, which consists of 830 miles of pipelines and tunnels, and approximately 400 connections to its member agencies. Analysis of these samples is done at Metropolitan’s state-of-the-art water quality laboratory in La Verne, with a staff that includes nationally-recognized experts conducting groundbreaking research.

**The Value Of Water**

With a board-approved budget of approximately $1.5 billion, Metropolitan’s current wholesale rate is less than a penny per gallon for treated water. Rate revenue supports the cost of moving water across the Mojave Desert via Metropolitan’s Colorado River Aqueduct, and covers State Water Project costs for securing and pumping the water from Northern California and over the Tehachapi Mountains into Southern California. Water rate revenue also supports Metropolitan investments in a diverse portfolio of resource programs, including conservation, water recycling, groundwater banking and cleanup. Since 1982, Metropolitan ratepayers have invested nearly a half-billion dollars to produce enough recycled water and remediated groundwater to supply 5 million households, which has kept demands flat despite significant population growth. On a per capita basis, Southern California water use has dropped about 25 percent over the past generation.

**A Tradition of Foresight**

Metropolitan and its 26 public member agencies have a history and vision of planning. It sized the Colorado River Aqueduct to meet demands for several decades into the future. The agency also constructed a complex distribution system that has the ability to efficiently transport water from either Northern...
Diamond Valley Lake in 2013

California or the Colorado River and distribute supplies throughout its six-county service area serving nearly 19 million people.

Metropolitan serves as the region’s water planner, meeting the water needs of future generations with a diversified portfolio that includes conservation, new local water resources, and water-supply partnerships in Northern California and the Colorado River basin. Metropolitan and its member agencies were among the first to embrace and help fund conservation initiatives through rebate programs for low-flow toilets, high-efficiency washers, and outdoor landscapes. Today, Metropolitan has the largest water conservation program in the nation. Metropolitan has sought to transform the market for water-saving landscapes and devices through rebates and other incentives, including an unprecedented $450 million rebate/turf removal effort during the drought in 2014 and 2015.

Metropolitan ratepayers have also invested $2 billion to build Diamond Valley Lake, the largest local reservoir in California, which stores water that can be used to supply the region in dry years or during emergencies. Without this essential water source, Southern California would have faced water rationing three years ago.

Metropolitan is also investing more than a quarter-billion dollars each year through mid-2022 to maintain and repair its infrastructure to secure greater water reliability for the region.

**California’s Water Future — Metropolitan’s Role**

As the provider of water supplies for a trillion-dollar Southern California economy and half the state’s population, Metropolitan strives to be a fiscally responsible partner and facilitator of innovative solutions to the major water challenges confronting California and the West.

In the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Metropolitan is dedicated to a comprehensive plan to protect water supply reliability for California and improve the health of the Delta’s ecosystem. Metropolitan supports plans to improve the movement of Delta water in a way that minimizes conflict between fish and water-pumping operations.

In its commitment to stewardship, Metropolitan has formed partnerships with stakeholders that include environmental, agricultural and business interests that focus on economically and environmentally sustainable water supply solutions for California.
The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-chartered cooperative of 26 member agencies — cities and public water agencies — that serves nearly 19 million people in six counties. Metropolitan imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies and helps its members develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.

The mission of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is to provide its service area with adequate and reliable supplies of high-quality water to meet present and future needs in an environmentally and economically responsible way.